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ABSTRACT

In an effort to form baseline data and information on the activity of learners participating in courses offered by Athabasca University, an individual learner tracking study was initiated. A random selection of 38 learners submitted weekly forms indicating their level of activity in courses, their motivational level, and the amount of contact they had with the institution during the week. All volunteer learners received a packet of weekly forms and instructions, were contacted by the REDEAL (Research and Evaluation of Distance Education for the Adult Learner) staff, and completed a questionnaire. Results indicated that course completers studied more hours and were more highly motivated than non-completers. Motivation rating dropped for both completers and non-completers as the course progressed but showed increases both during the examination process and when contact with tutors was made. Conclusions were that tutor contact with learners is very infrequent, a relationship exists between learner motivation and involvement with Athabasca University, many learners have difficulty developing the routine and self-control necessary for completing courses, and the delivery system does not allow for flexibility to suit the tremendous heterogeneity of the learner population. (Appendixes include sample comments from forms and a sample form.) (Author/YLB)

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Project REDEAL

Distance Education From the Learner's Perspective: The Results of Individual Learner Tracking at Athabasca University

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REDEAL Research Report #10

October, 1980

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Abstract

In an effort to form baseline data and information on the activity of learners participating in courses offered by Athabasca University, an individual learner tracking study was initiated. A random selection of learners submitted weekly forms indicating their level of activity in courses, their motivational level, and the amount of contact they had with the institution during the week. The results indicate that course completers studied more hours and were more highly motivated than non-completers. Motivation rating dropped for both completers and non-completers as the course progressed but showed increases both during the examination process and when contact with tutors was made. A discussion regarding the results of several hypotheses is included along with a general discussion of the implications these results have for improving distance education delivery systems.

Distance Education From the Learner's Perspective:

The Results of Individual Learner Tracking at Athabasca University

In the literature concerning correspondence education, including the growing literature on distance education, the need for research on the methodology is stressed (Childs, 197[illegible] Wangdahl, 1977). With many institutions moving into the distance education business one would expect lines of support for comprehensive research programs developing in response to the growing interest in distance education. However, there appears to be only limited research programs underway and distance education still faces a dramatic shortage of empirical information about its components, students, and general effects.

The general lack of empirical information on distance education has forced distance educational institutions to create methods and procedures for instructional design and delivery of distance courses using what could be described as a "sophisticated guesswork" model. Sophisticated, because many institutions employ rather sophisticated professionals to provide input to the problem (e.g. instructional psychologists, media designers, etc.). Guesswork, because many of the problems facing distance educational institutions are either not in the repertoire of the sophisticated experts so they "guess" about solutions or because persons in charge, expert or not, often ignore empirically-based procedures and processes and make guesses about solutions and alternatives.

The sophisticated guesswork model, although generally inadequate, would be tolerable (and perhaps understandable) if the model itself included an empirical feedback loop to help eliminate guessing. Unfortunately, that loop, although given much verbal attention, often does not exist, and when it does exist rarely functions efficiently. Moreover, even when data is collected it is rarely fed immediately back into the guesswork system which, often by the time the data is available is usually so sophisticated, in the organizational complexity sense, that the empirical information would be disruptive to the mandate and role of the guesswork system. This educational "catch-22" can often catapult the institution into the future with little or no data base supporting its procedures and methodology.

The lack of an empirical base in distance education also poses a tremendous obstacle for researchers and evaluators wishing to overcome the sophisticated guesswork approach. Without baseline measures of learner performance, learner attitudes, and learner characteristics, coupled with detailed information regarding the range of instructional alternatives employed and the behaviour of persons employing them, comparative investigations into variables thought to be important in distance education is made extremely difficult. For example, it would be difficult to determine if the scheduling of periodic seminars in a particular course improved learner completion rates if: a) you did not know the existing learner completion rate;

b) you did not know what type of learners were completing in comparison to those who were not; c) you did not know the impact of other "motivational" variables that make up the course in question; and d) there was no existing data collection system in place to allow you to gather the information your study would require. Moreover, you could spend years getting answers to the above questions only to discover that costs were the key factor in the selection of course design variables and anything that cost more would not be used no matter how effective it turned out to be.

It should be pointed out that the above concerns regarding an empirical base for distance education apply equally well to traditional forms of education. However, the lack of direct and sustained contact with the learner population in most distance educational settings magnifies the problem. Researchers are not only without baseline measures of learner and institutional behaviour, they cannot even easily observe the phenomenon in question (i.e. the learner). Attempting to plan and conduct research under such constraints may partially explain the relative lack of research literature on distance education.

The present paper reports an attempt to overcome some of the problems discussed above. In attempting to initiate a relatively comprehensive program of research and evaluation into distance

education (Project REDEAL[1], Athabasca University, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada), researchers were immediately faced with the problem of having little empirical data available and very limited contact with learners, especially learners engaging in planned learning activities. In an attempt to alleviate this lack of information and better understand the learners who would eventually be participating in research and evaluation studies, a learner tracking system was put into place.

The learner tracking experiment described in this paper was designed to provide the REDEAL team with as much data as possible on a randomly selected group of learners across courses at Athabasca University. The goal of this study was to produce baseline data in an effort to put the team closer to the actual behaviour of learners. Although such data could be fed directly into the redesign of course materials and delivery systems (as shown in the top of Figure 1), the information obtained in this learner tracking effort was instead fed into the design of research and evaluation projects (as shown in the bottom of Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Although the primary goal of the learner tracking project was to provide the REDEAL team with a "snapshot" of the typical behaviour of distance learners, it also served as a type of testing ground for data collection. The learner tracking project gave the team immediate experience with the difficulties and procedures important in the collection of direct learner information. Again, due to the general lack of experience with direct learner data collection, it was necessary to create new methods for the collection of such data and gain experience in their use.

In summary, the learner tracking project, instituted by REDEAL, was designed to meet the following objectives:

a. help develop baseline data regarding the week-to-week performance of distance learners;

b. help develop baseline data describing the week-to-week activity of Athabasca University in response to distance learners;

c. bring the REDEAL research team members in closer contact with the distance learner;

d. provide information relevant to the planning and conduct of other REDEAL research and evaluation projects; and

e. give the REDEAL team experience in direct learner data collection.

Method

As shown in Table 1, a total of 38 learners were randomly selected from newly enrolled learners across 19 different Athabasca University courses to participate in learner tracking activity. Thirteen learners began participating in May/June 1979, while the remaining 25 began in October/November 1979.

Insert Table 1 about here

Trackers were randomly selected, newly enrolled students, chosen to represent a wide range of characteristics of the population of Athabasca University learners in general. These include: a) geographical location across the Province of Alberta; and b) sex (approximately 50% male, 50% female). Courses were also chosen to represent the range of offerings at Athabasca University (Humanities, Sciences, etc.) and level of offerings (e.g. junior and senior level courses).

All learners selected to participate were contacted via telephone by a member of the REDEAL project team and asked if they would volunteer their services. Learners in the May/June group were told they would receive tuition reimbursements for the course they were asked to track. Learners in the October/November group were

told they would receive $10 for each credit they tracked. Of the 43 potential volunteers contacted, only one person in the May/June group indicated he/she could not participate, while four people in the October/November group declined the offer (leaving the N = 38 described above).

All learners volunteering received a packet of material specifically prepared for learner tracking. The packet contained a set of weekly forms (see Appendix B) used to record the activity of the learner in the course being tracked each week. Learners were also provided with postage paid return envelopes and a set of written instructions for completing the forms. Learners were also told they were free to phone the REDEAL team at any time, and that REDEAL team members might be contacting them from time to time.

All volunteer learners were also sent a questionnaire asking them their reasons for taking the course being tracked and why they withdrew (if so). Questionnaires were sent to all volunteer learners in June 1980 and they were requested to return them as soon as possible.

Results

Demographic Description

The 38 students who participated in the Learner Tracking study supplied the following personal information on their initial Registration Form. In addition to providing some background data on the participants, the demographic examination of this data served to ensure that the group was in fact a random sample of Athabasca University students. A summary of this descriptive information can be seen in Table 2.

The majority of this group was female (73.7%) and between 25 and 34 years of age (52.6%). Their first language tended to be English (78.9%). In regard to educational background, 47.2% had some prior university education at the time of their admission to Athabasca University. Also, 15.8% were enrolled in a second educational program at that time. The majority (57.9%) expressed a preference for a combination of learning situations. Eighty-four percent were attending university for career and personal reasons; 66% were attending Athabasca University specifically for reasons of time and distance. In terms of regional distribution, 42% lived in a rural area; 50% in Edmonton or Calgary; and 8% in smaller urban centres.

Table 2 goes about here

Overview of Data Collection

The 38 students were asked to submit a progress form at weekly intervals. A total of 686 forms were returned, an average of 18 forms per student. Of the random sample, 40% (or 15) completed their respective courses while 60% (or 23) were classed as having withdrawn from their course.

Two indices appear throughout the Results section: motivation level and number of studying hours. Learners assessed their motivation level on the weekly form by circling a number from 1 to 7 in a Likert-type format. Over the course of the data collection, the average motivation level was 3.7. Number of studying hours was a second weekly-reported index that was felt to be indicative of a student's involvement in the course. Average study time was found to be 5.2 hours per week.

Three sets of results appear on most of the following tables. In addition to reporting on the group of 38 students, the researchers felt that valuable information might be collected by separating the group into completers and withdrawals to examine their respective patterns.

Addressing the Original Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. Learner motivation decreases as the course progresses. Table 3 summarizes the relevant data. Both motivation level and number of studying hours were measured at five time intervals: weeks 1, 2, 8, 16 and 24. From week 1 to week 24, motivation dropped from an average of 3.7 to 2.9. In the same time frame, studying hours decreased from 4.4 to 3.6 hours per week.

Table 3 goes about here

Hypothesis 2. Rate of completing the first credit predicts the rate of completing the course. Table 4 indicates the rate of completion of Exam 1. First, the number of credits represented by the exam was disregarded.[2] In this case, the people who completed the course took 9.7 days longer to complete the first exam than people who withdrew. When the credit value of the first exam was 1, completers finished the first credit exam 12.6 days faster than people who withdrew.

Table 4 goes about here

Hypothesis 3. High learner motivation correlates with a large number of tutor initiated phone contacts to learner.

Hypothesis 6. High learner motivation correlates with a large number of learner-to-tutor phone contacts. Hypothesis 3 and 6 will be presented together. Pertinent data is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 goes about here

Regarding tutor-initiated phone calls, the average was 1.1 call per student. Motivation level in the week of the call was 4.1, 0.5 higher than average. At the same time, number of studying hours was 0.4 less than the average of 5.2.

Telephone contacts tended to be learner-initiated, with an average of 3.2 per student. At this time, motivation level was 0.6 higher than average and the number of study hours was 3.0 higher than average. In comparing the two sub-groups, the completers made an average of 6.3 calls per student while the withdrawals made an average of 1.2. Number of study hours for the former was 9.2 and for the latter, 4.7.

Hypothesis 4. The more hours per week the learner spends studying, the greater the probability for course completion. Spending less than four hours per week predicts withdrawals.

Table 6 indicates that completers studied 6.6 hours per week, whereas the withdrawals studied 3.2 hours per week.

Hypothesis 5. High learner motivation correlates with high total study time. High learner motivation was defined to be a value greater than or equal to 4.0. When this level was attained, the average study time was 7.4 hours per week. When motivation level was less than 4.0, average study time was 2.7 hours per week. (See Table 6.)

Hypothesis 7. Learners who are goal oriented have faster rates of progress.

Hypothesis 8. Learners who are goal oriented spend large amounts of time studying.

Hypothesis 9. Learners who are goal oriented are more motivated.

Table 6 goes about here

Hypothesis 7, 8, and 9 were treated as one. Learners who could be described as progressing, spending large amounts of time studying, and more motivated tended to be "completers" in the present study. Thus, goal orientation was compared for the completer and withdrawal sub-groups.

Two indices to measure goal orientation were available. These are presented in Table 7. Students had been requested to supply their reason for attending Athabasca University and their reason for attending Athabasca University on their registration form upon admission. The former index did not appear to differentiate the goal orientation of completers and withdrawals. However, the latter index seemed to indicate that withdrawals attended more often for time reasons (47.8%) and less often for educational reasons (13%).

Table 7 goes about here

Hypothesis 10. Learners who fail two consecutive exams are "doomed" to failure, i.e. withdrawal.

Because of the nature of the data base, exam failures were not retained in the student record system. Therefore, this Hypothesis was not tested.

4. Additional Findings

Group Differences. In the process of addressing the original ten hypotheses, some differences were revealed for two sub-groups: completers and withdrawals. These are displayed in Table 8.

With regard to demographic differences, it was observed that completers tended to be female, over 35 years of age, and attending Athabasca University for career and personal reasons. Withdrawals had a higher proportion of males, were under 35, and attending Athabasca University for reason of time.

The two groups were compared on performance. Completers returned an average of 26 weekly forms, twice as many as withdrawals. Ninty-three percent of the completers returned their final questionnaire compared to 22% of the withdrawals. Completers' motivation level was 3.9, 0.6 higher than the withdrawals. Completers studied an average of 6.6 hours per week; withdrawals 3.2.

Concerning telephone contact with Athabasca University, tutors made an average of one call per student, regardless of their status in the course. However, completers made over five times as many learner-initiated calls as withdrawals (6.3 calls per student compared to 1.2 calls).

Table 8 goes about here

The Exam Process and Motivation. The student's motivation level was examined at five different time intervals throughout the exam process: the first time frame was the week the student submitted a request to take an exam; the second, when the student received acknowledgement from the University that the request had been received; the third, when the exam was written; the fourth, when the exam was sent to the marker; and the fifth, when feedback was received. (See Table 9.)

Motivation level rose from 4.0 the first week to 4.6 the week the exam was written, and down to 3.8 when feedback was received. During this exam process, the motivation levels were higher than the average level of 3.6.

The Exam Process and Study Time. The average number of studying hours peaked at 9.2, the week in which the exam was written. At all measured phases of the exam process, the number of studying hours was higher than the average of 5.2.

Table 9 goes about here

Table 10 goes about here

Discussion

Demographics

The 38 participants in the Learner Tracking study would appear to be a random sample of Athabasca University students. An examination of their comments (see Appendix 1) reveals that this is a group diversified in terms of their backgrounds. (e.g. #74 "put in a lot of overtime at work, as we had a broken machine, so had to go to ------- to finish off our papers."; #71 "I'm helping my husband put the crop in and it doesn't seem easy to find the time to study."; and, #76 "My wife thinks to run a business and increase study time is a conflict of interest.")

Despite the diversity, these 38 learners shared many common concerns. They expressed dissatisfaction with their inability to get into a routine after many years of not studying. (e.g. #68 "I haven't been in school for about nine years so I have to get into a routine."; and, #70 "Studying at home is a very difficult activity requiring very good self-discipline and a co-operative family.")

However, several students commented that they were able to fit studying into their present routine as a result of the flexibility at Athabasca University. (e.g. #67 "I was having such a tough time with the course I decided to take three weeks off and not even think about -------. I was then able to return to it, and things seemed a lot clearer."; #66 "Athabasca University helped by giving a suspension; with the pressure off, the creative juices can flow again.")

Several student comments reflected a lack of self-confidence when it came to their study skills. (e.g. #63 "It has been about six years since I was in high school, and my studying methods are still a little dusty."; #64 "Organizing is really my main problem which I am slowly sorting out.")

The Original Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. From the data, one might conclude that motivation level and study time decrease as the course progresses. However, further examination indicated that completers generally maintain their original average levels, while withdrawals' motivation and study time appear more likely to decrease over time. This suggests that, to maintain motivation level and study time, learners have to be involved (i.e. by completing credits or making telephone contact with the tutor). This is substantiated by the learners' comments: #1 "Motivation high because I worked on and finished an assignment."; #9 "Made the move to communicate and it helped in the motivational department."; #19 "I've had less time to work on my assignments, consequently my motivation has gone down."

Hypothesis 2. The data indicated that completers' rate of first credit completion was only 12.6 days faster than withdrawals'. However, only 30% of the withdrawals wrote the first credit exam. Sixty-eight percent of those who completed the first credit eventually completed the course.

Hypotheses 3 and 6. Learner motivation appeared to be related directly to telephone contact, whether initiated by the tutor or by the student. Completers made over five times as many calls to their tutors than withdrawals. Perhaps the former group was a lot more self-directed. Student comments regarding tutor contact seemed to indicate the need for the human element in their educational experience. For example, #24 "Just a call from the tutor might bring back some enthusiasm."; #26 "Occasional call from tutor could help to continue interest in course."; #35 "The tutor phoning gave you the feeling that someone cares."

Hypotheses 4 and 5. Study time and course completion were directly related, with completers studying twice as many hours as withdrawals. Motivation level and study time were also directly related, perhaps in a cyclical pattern, so that success in accomplishing the first assignment or exam increased the learner's motivation level which, in turn, encouraged the learner to work on the next assignment. The inter-relationship between motivation and study time was expressed by the learners' comments on motivation in Appendix 1.

Hypotheses 7, 8 and 9. Regarding goal orientation and success, it appeared that learners who attended Athabasca University because of time reasons were more likely to withdraw from their courses. It is possible that a learner who begins a course with the assumption that he is saving time (and perhaps not required to devote as much time as he would to a regular university course) is not being realistic.

Group Differences: Completers and Withdrawals

Essentially, the two groups differed in terms of their involvement in their course. The completers may have been more realistic to start with in terms of the amount of time they would have to invest, and they studied twice as many hours throughout the course as did the withdrawals.

Since completers made five times as many calls to tutors, they might have a different attitude towards the role of the tutor.

This suggests that the University might assist their students in developing a set of realistic expectations (i.e. working habits, tutor contact) via pre-orientation contacts by mail and telephone.

The Exam Process

It would appear that learners are more motivated and spend more time studying during the exam process, when they have a sense of active involvement; that is, from the time they submit a request to write an exam to the time they receive feedback on said exam.

General Discussion

Although the results of this study are not necessarily representative of the entire range of learners and learner behavior within Athabasca University, the results provide a "snapshot" of the general characteristics of learner participation in Athabasca University courses. Moreover, simply looking at the demographic data indicates the wide diversity of Athabasca University learners.

After examining the results of this study in detail, the question of "What does all this mean?" may begin to become important. Although there are several interpretations of what the data mean, the following represent a few of the more obvious conclusions that can be reached from this study. First, the results indicate that learners are interacting with Athabasca University very infrequently and on somewhat of a random basis. The majority of contacts with Athabasca University are through the tutor. However, it is clear that tutors are not initiating this contact but that the majority of contacts are made when the learner contacts the tutor. Moreover, it is clear that tutors, across courses and time, are not having contact with learners at least once every two weeks. At some points in time (e.g. over the summer months) contact with learners is very infrequent (less than once every three months).

Second, it appears that there is a relationship between learner motivation and involvement with Athabasca University. Although the strength of this relationship remains to be determined, learners appear to feel more motivated when they are either in frequent contact with tutors and/or when

they are actively involved in course related work. Such a finding would justify further investigation into the possible utility of more structured learner contact as a motivational tool. Moreover, such a result would be highly consistent with most popular models of instruction (Anderson and Faust, 1973) which describe the importance of keeping learners in an active role.

Third, it is clear that many Athabasca University learners have difficulty developing the routine and self-control necessary for completing credits and courses. Many learners are apparently looking for help in this regard. However, it is also clear that Athabasca University does not serve as a model for such routine, in that institutional support systems for the learner do not follow a routine (e.g. tutor contact, amount and regularity of feedback, etc., is not routine or regular). Perhaps if the Athabasca University system was more "routine" and predictable, we could expect more in that regard from learners.

Fourth, examining life as a distant learner, from the learner's perspective, points to the fact that reality of instructional delivery at Athabasca University differs considerably from the institutions intentions with respect to delivery. That is, there appears to be a substantial error rate at Athabasca University with the conversion of theory to practice. For example, Athabasca University recommends that tutors have contact with learners at least once every two weeks. The result of this study clearly indicate that, in practice this rule is rarely being followed. Another example would be the speed at which learners are given feedback on

examinations and assignments. In theory, Athabasca University would subscribe to a rapid feedback model. However, in practice that feedback is often delayed.

Finally, even within a limited sample such as the one used for this study, the tremendous heterogeneity of the learner population is evident. Such diversity would suggest that the differential treatment of learners would be essential to overall success. However, there is little evidence of such treatment by Athabasca University either in course development or delivery. No matter who they are or why they enrolled in a course, they receive the same course materials package, are generally required to do the same assignments and examinations, and are given the same type and amount of support (at least in theory). Moreover, it is doubtful that the instructional staff attempting to provide support systems for learners are aware of the background on individual learners, their reasons for enrolling, etc. Although that information would, upon first examination, appear to be central to the delivery of courses, it is not surprising that it is of little interest or use because of the lack of flexibility within the delivery system to allow for individual differences.

In summary, although the volume of research on distance education is growing steadily (Ljosa, 1980), it is clear that individual institutions must be capable of mounting research and evaluation efforts of their own in an effort to understand the problems facing their learner constituency. This is especially important if open admission requirements allow for a highly diverse population of learners to participate in courses and programs.

The sophisticated guesswork model must be replaced with a model [illegible] to be much more cybernetic. Although such models are often [illegible] to initiate, they can provide results which tend to be punitive, and have been ignored because of costing fears the results of this effort would suggest the benefits gained from careful evaluation and research far outweigh any negative features.

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Footnotes

[1]REDEAL is an acronym for Research and Evaluation of Distance Education for the Adult Learner.

[2]Some Athabasca University courses have units with examinations which are larger than one credit (e.g Psychology 206 has four 1.5 credit units).

Table 1

Summary of Learners and Courses Included in

Individual Learner Tracking.

		May/June Group N=13	Oct/Nov Group N=25	
Payment Arrangement		Complete Tuition Return	$10/credit tracked	
Courses Tracked		Sample Size	Sample Size	Total
French[1]	103	None	3	3
Humanities[2]	200	none	2	2
Computing	205	none	2	2
Psychology	206	1	none	1
Sociology	208	2	3	5
English	210	2	none	2
Statistics	215	2	3	5
Accounting	216	2	none	2
History	224	none	2	2
Child Development	228	none	3	3
Communications	229	1	3	4
Geology	231	none	1	1
Administration	232	2	none	2
Communications	243	1	none	1
Renaissance[3]	300	none	2	2
Management	319	none	1	1
		N^1=13	N^2=25	N=38

[1]Courses designated by a course number in the 100's are at the preparatory level designed to prepare students for university-level study.

[2]Courses designated by a number in the 200's are junior-level courses (introductory) equivalent to first year courses.

[3]Courses designated by a number in the 300's are senior level courses and assume either a background of university level learning or a 200 level prerequisite.

Table 2

Demographic Information (n=38)

		Percentage
1. Sex:	Female	73.7
	Male	26.3
2. Age:	18 to 24	21.0
	25 to 34	52.6
	35 plus	26.4
3. First Language:	English	78.9
	Other	18.5
	French	2.6
4. Highest Education Level:	Secondary School	26.4
	Technical or College	26.4
	Some University	47.2
5. Enrolled in a Second Program:	No	84.2
	Yes	15.8
6. Preferred Learning Situation:	Combination	57.9
	On Own	26.9
	Not Sure	13.2
	In a Group	0.0
7. Reason Attending University:	Career	42.1
	Personal	42.1
	Educational	7.9
	Not Answered	7.9
8. Reason At Athabasca University:	Time	34.2
	Distance	31.6
	Educational	18.4
	Not Answered	10.5
	Financial	5.3
9. Region:	Rural	42.1
	Edmonton	26.3
	Calgary	23.7
	Medicine Hat, Leth	5.3
	Grand Prairie, Fort Mac.	2.6

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Table 3

Student Progress by Week

Week	Motivation Level			Number of Studying Hours		
	Total n=38	Completers n=15	Withdrawals n=23	Total n=38	Completers n=15	Withdrawals n=23
1	3.7	3.6	3.8	4.4	4.7	4.2
2	3.7	3.9	3.6	4.8	6.1	3.7
8	3.2	3.7	2.6	3.4	5.0	1.8
16	3.1	3.6	2.3	5.1	7.2	2.1
24	2.9	2.8	3.0	3.6	4.0	2.9
Average:	3.6	3.9	3.3	5.2	6.6	3.2

Table 4

Performance Records

	Completers	Withdrawals
Number of Subjects	15	23
EXAM 1		
Credit Value 1, 2 or 3: n	15	7
Number of Days to write:	83.1	73.4
EXAM 1		
Credit Value of 1: n	12	6
Number of days to write:	57.2	69.8
EXAM 2 n:	13	
Number of days:	113.5	
EXAM 3 n:	12	
Number of days:	172.7	
EXAM 4 n:	6	
Number of Days	269.2	
EXAM 5 n:	2	
Number of Days	321.0	
Number of days to completion:	212.8	

Table 5

Telephone Contacts

Contact Type	Total n=38	Completers n=15	Withdrawals n=23
Tutor-Initiated			
number of calls	41	15	26
average no./student	1.1	1.0	1.1
Motivation Level	4.1	4.5	3.9
No. of Studying Hours	4.8	7.7	3.1
Learner-Initiated			
number of calls	122	95	27
average no./student	3.2	6.3	1.2
Motivation Level	4.2	4.2	4.1
No. of Studying Hours	8.2	9.2	4.7
Average Motivation Level	3.6	3.9	3.3
Average Average No. of Studying Hours	5.2	6.6	3.2

Table 6

Motivation Level and Number of Studying Hours

	Motivation Level	Number of Studying Hours
Group Average: (n=38)	3.6	5.2
Completers Average: (n=15)	3.9	6.6
Withdrawals Average: (n=23)	3.3	3.2
n=38	Greater than or equal to 4.0	7.4
n=38	Less than 4.0	2.7

Table 7

Goal Orientation

	Total n=38	Completers n=15	Withdrawals n=23
Reason Attending University			
Career	42.1%	46.7%	39.1%
Personal	42.1%	33.3%	47.8%
Reason At Athabasca University			
Time	34.2%	13.3%	47.8
Education	18.4%	26.7%	13.0%

Table 8

Group Differences: Completers and Withdrawals

	Completers n 15	Withdrawals n 23	Total n 38
a) Demographic Differences:			
1. Sex:			
Female	86.7%	65.2%	73.7%
Male	13.3	34.8	26.3
2. Age:			
18 to 24	26.7	17.4	21.0
25 to 34	33.3	65.2	52.6
35 plus	40.0	17.4	26.4
3. Reason at Athabasca:			
Time	13.3	47.8	34.2
Distance	33.3	30.4	31.6
Educational	26.8	13.0	18.4
Financial	13.3	0.0	5.3
Not Answered	13.3	8.7	10.5
b) Student Performance:			
1. Forr Returns			
i) Average no. in weeks	26.0	13.0	18.1
ii) Final Questionnaire	93.0.	22.0	50.0
2. Motivation Level	3.9	3.3	3.6
3. Studying Hours per week	6.6	3.2	5.2
c) Telephone Contacts:			
1. Tutor to Learner Calls	1.0	1.1	1.1
2. Learner to Tutor Calls	6.3	1.2	3.2

Table 9

The Exam Process and Student Motivation Level

Week	Motivation Level: Total n=38	Completers n=15	Withdrawals n=23
1. Exam Request Submitted	4.0	3.9	4.2
2. Acknowledgment Received	4.3	4.4	3.8
3. Exam Written	4.6	4.6	4.6
4. Exam Sent to Marker	3.9	3.8	4.1
5. Feedback Received	3.8	3.9	3.5
Average:	3.6	3.9	3.3

Table 10

The Exam Process and Number of Studying Hours

Week	Studying Hours: Total n=38	Completers n=15	Withdrawals n=23
1. Exam Request Submitted	6.8	7.2	5.6
2. Acknowledgement Received	7.8	8.6	5.3
3. Exam Written	9.2	10.4	5.2
4. Exam Sent to Marker	6.4	6.9	4.5
5. Feedback Received	5.5	6.0	3.7
Average:	5.2	6.6	3.2

FORMATIVE EVALUATION MODEL OF EDUCATION EVALUATION

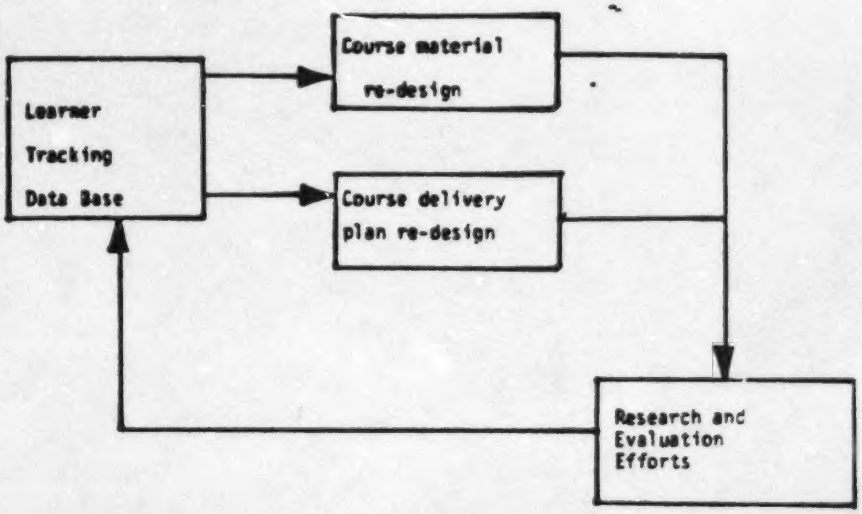
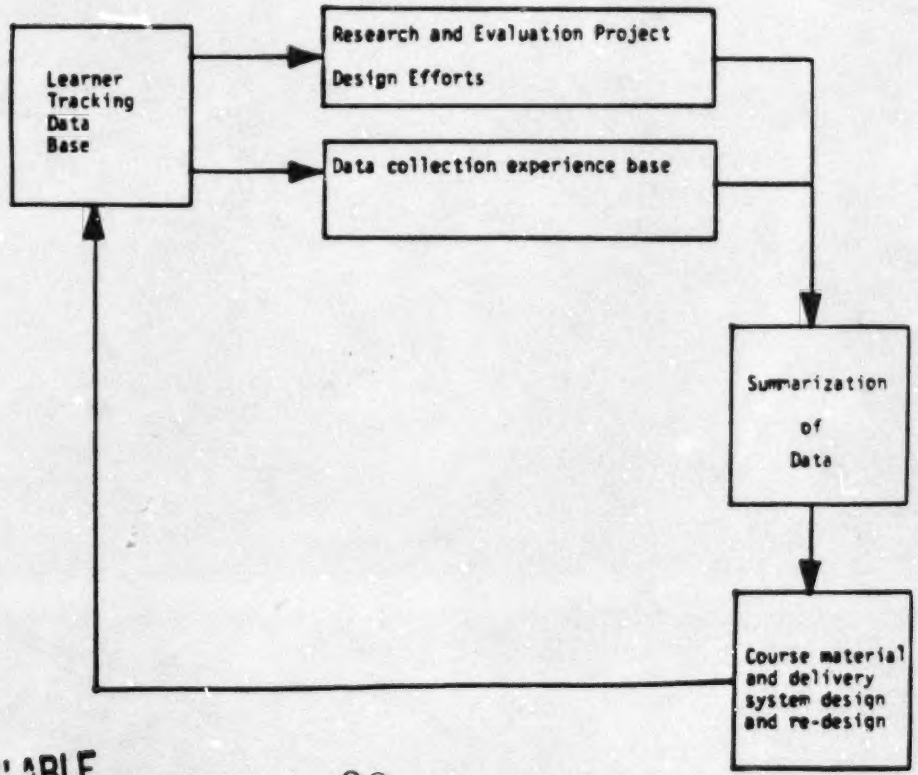


FIGURE ONE: The Flow of Information into Course Re-Design Versus its Flow into Research and Evaluation Planning.

REDEAL LEARNER TRACKING MODEL



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Appendix A

Student Weekly Course Monitor Forms: Sample Comments

A.	Motivation		1 - 21
B.	Educational Concerns:	Tutors	22 - 36
		Communications	37 - 43
		Exams	44 - 51
		Feedback	52 - 61
C.	Personal Comments:	Study Skills	52 - 64
		Flexibility and Athabasca University	65 - 67
		Personal	68 - 77

Motivation

1. Motivation high because I worked on and finished an assignment.
2. Higher motivation, because of studying for exam.
3. Higher motivation because of less outside pressure.
4. Began new course material which is always more interesting than reviewing or preparing for an exam.
5. The call from my tutor telling me my assignment was done well lifted my spirits but the reading seems to be getting heavier.
6. Motivation higher as I am enjoying this part of the course more.
7. Motivation, at the present, is a curiosity to see what is in the course and get started into it--therefore it is great.
8. First of all, the material I find is interesting and keeps getting better, that always helps.
9. Made the move to communicate and it helped in the motivational department.
10. Motivation came from having first assignment nearly ready and a determination to get it off by Friday to allow for a short vacation.
11. There is nothing like a deadline to improve motivation, re: in order to write credit block two exam I have to apply three weeks ahead of time, Nov. 13, consequently I must get the essays written. This up two (points) from last week.

12. Motivation higher because of studying for exam and starting a new section.
13. Motivation was fairly high because I had watched the first video tapes and had a call from my tutor introducing herself and seeing how I was doing.
14. No interest. I did try to get the radio program this week, but it wouldn't come through. It's really frustrating as this is my only link with the course (no cable TV here yet). The change is that I tried. I do want these credits but when you can't even get the radio . . .
15. Radio broadcast wrong one.
16. As the week progressed, I began to review work rather than absorb new information. Motivation began to decline.
17. I was disheartened by my mark on the exam, but then my tutor explained that the first exam is hard until you realize what the examiner expects.
18. Rating is the same as last week. My motivation isn't high when I have to do the essay assignments. As stated many times, my motivation would be much higher if I could find the text, the workbook (and the other three sociology texts I have at home), enough material to write 250 - 399 words.
19. I've had less time to work on my assignments, consequently my motivation has gone down. But as soon as I can start regular study times again I'm sure that I'll be more interested.

20. I found the less time I study the less motivated I am.

21. I've been away from it too long. Once I start studying regularly my motivation will pick up.

Tutors

22. I have not yet contacted my tutor, and he has not contacted me. I suppose effort in both parties would produce a positive motivation situation.

23. I don't know, maybe at least stay in touch, tell me it is okay I am so far behind. The only reason I have not given up is that I am determined to get this course done if it takes two years.

24. Just a call from my tutor might bring back some enthusiasm.

25. I haven't heard from a tutor for so long, not that I need to, I am not doing much, but I sometimes feel that I should just give it up. I will never be done by June anyway.

26. Occasional call from tutor would help to continue interest in course.

27. The call from the tutor was a lift. I find it hard to initiate a phone call (a personal hang-up of mine) unless there is something really big, so appreciated his calling to see that all was well.

28. Now that the tutor has called upon me I feel more active as a student.

29. I would have liked to have seen the tutor be more aggresive. That is, put some questions to me. Three quarters of the time I was in such a fog with this course that I didn't know the

questions to ask.

30. Tutor did little to aid me in this course. Even on my last assignment comment was "excellent job, best of luck on final exam." I believe a somewhat inadequate comment to an assignment in which I spent a considerable amount of time.

31. I really feel that upon receiving an assignment back from the tutor that the tutor should call the student to explain his stand. I realize that it should be the student calling the tutor, but this makes it rather difficult if you feel awkward as was my situation.

32. However, it is at least the second time in this course that we have had such a conversation, and to be told not to worry about a concept bothers me. There is obviously a difference between a "mature" student and a younger one. I'm sure at 18 I would have said, "that's good, I don't have to learn that."

33. Contacted tutor and really got rolling. Tutor gave suggestions and helpful information.

34. AU helped out in motivation when I got a call from my tutor who just called called to see how I was making out and made me feel they were interested in what I was doing. It made me want to work harder on the course.

35. The tutor phoning gave you the feeling that someone cares.

36. Tutor gave me all of five minutes on the phone last week, really frustrated about the whole thing.

Communications

37. Still haven't received material for credit two and three, although Material Requisition said they were going to send it three weeks ago.

38. It was good to hear from ---. Any phone communication from the University raises my interest level in my studies. I still have not heard from my tutor, although I believe she is on holidays at this time.

39. Told by Registry that not enough money was on file to cover cost of the course. Money sent and course to be sent. There was definite lack of communication here since those responsible for materials said the materials would be sent the weeks previous.

40. There are, of course, lots of questions with answers provided, in the study guide which are invaluable, but it's a lonely life this home study education method. I know I needed more contact with university for this course. As you may remember I didn't know what questions to ask for many weeks, I was so lost.

41. In summary, I don't think I would have ever completed this course if it weren't for the fact of completing these course monitor forms. This would indicate that the University must try to maintain as much contact as possible. Many thanks for the opportunity to participate in the REDEAL project.

42. On Monday, December 10, I phoned Athabasca, and was eventually put through to the --- department. I asked a question re the Credit Block I exam. Was told that she (whoever it was!) would look it up and then call me back. As of today (Dec. 16) I still haven't heard.

43. Yes, I think that they could phone or try to give you more encouragement.

Exams

44. I received my exam date acknowledgment after I came home from writing the exam--could be the fault of the post office, but I didn't find it reassuring to wonder if I'm going to write the exam or not. I found at 4:15 p.m. Nov. 21 that the exam had arrived!

45. I sent for an exam and wish I knew more about the procedure. I had to find someone to supervise my exam and I didn't know who they would send it to, or how much time I'd need. I need more information, I would feel more relaxed about my exam.

46. I would like to hear about my exam. Seems like it's been a long wait.

47. Just wrote an exam and I feel I did partly good on it, but only time will tell.

48. Exam returned and that's very uplifting, feel good about course.

49. I called the examination clerk at Athabasca to see if my exam has been marked--I wrote the exam three weeks ago, and haven't heard how I did--they haven't marked the exam yet, she said it was sent to the marker on 11/29. This is frus*rating. 12/12

50. Spent most of the week awaiting essay results as I had finished credit block two. I really got a bit lazy till I received the assignments (A- & A+). I was also a bit concerned about the pass marks I would get and I wasn't too sure of how well I wrote the essays.

51. AU could have given me some word back even if it was only to say it would be awhile before the exam was marked because of Christmas, just anything. I have a schedule from my tutor which gives me an approximate finishing date and I am finding it impossible to follow because I haven't heard yet. By now I am supposed to have written another exam, but I can't until I know if I have to go back and study the last credits work again.

Feedback

52. Receiving my exam results (especially if the mark is better than expected) is always a boost.

53. Secondly, receiving my exam results (83% in case you're interested) boosted my morale and motivation that much more.

54. Receiving my marks was a great lift.

55. As you can see my rating has changed a lot since the last week and that is because I finally received the exam mark. The

results from my exam surprised me and gave me a lot of inspiration. Now I have to try even harder to keep up my mark.

56. Receiving feedback on my assignment was good motivation. I can't think of any other possible aids to my motivation at this time.

57. Would still appreciate getting feedback on the essays that were marked for the course mark--credit block 3. Other than a mark I received an 80 and an 85 on the other but feel feedback would help me improve my essay writing.

58. Would find it useful if the person who marked my paper would phone me to give me the feedback re my errors. I cannot remember what questions 7, 11 or 13 (etc.) were. It is helpful to know why I lost marks but I can't relate it to anything. I wrote the exam April 23, feedback arrived May 20.

59. I still feel that immediate feedback from the person marking my paper, with the paper in front of her would be useful to me. My tutor receives a copy of the piece of paper that is sent to me, by the time I receive the paper I've forgotten the questions that were bothering me.

60. I was not motivated at all since I received a paper back the previous week which I had thought was good but it turned out to be unsatisfactory to my tutor.

61. I felt inclined to work this week but was a little concerned as to the exam result, I have heard nothing from AU at all, although I wrote the exam on Dec. 13.

Study Skills

62. I don't have the necessary information to do either of these assignments. I'll gladly do the research if you tell me where to look. I'm not enthused about searching the entire U of C library especially since Athabasca University can't provide me with a U of C library card.

63. I was more nervous about writing the exam than I had expected. It has been about six years since I was in high school, and my studying methods are still a little dusty. It almost seems like I spent more time trying to decide either what to study or how to go about it, than actually studying. As a result, I am not so sure I did as well on the exam as I could have done, had I been better organized. Preparing the lecture for the same day did not help matters much either.

64. There was nothing AU could have done, as I said, organizing is really my main problem which I am slowly sorting out. I really feel I am the only one that can do it, it is something I have to work out on my own.

Flexibility and Athabasca University

65. The pressures of this time of year on the farm added to the course have proved too much for me. What has been my "lifeboat" all winter to keep my head out of water has now become a millstone and I feel I'm going down for the third time.

66. At this stage it's easier to grab time as it presents itself

than have the pressure of a schedule. In that way AU helped by giving a suspension, with the pressure off the creative juices can flow again.

67. Received assignment back and did well (88%). Am eligible to write second credit exam (which I have scheduled with my tutor for Nov. 29). Am only a little behind the suggested course schedule.

This does point out one distinct advantage of Athabasca University. You will remember when I was having such a tough time with the course I decided to take three weeks off and not even think about (the course). I was then able to return to it, and things seemed a lot clearer. Such a decision would be virtually impossible in a regular university situation.

Personal

68. I am very excited about starting the course. The only problem I am having is getting back into the "swing" of things. I haven't been in school for about nine years so I have to get into a routine of studying and working on assignments.

69. I was able to get into the course more steadily and found it very interesting. Still having trouble getting into a routine.

70. This week two of my three children have the flu and I had very little sleep for four days. This definitely affects motivation for all activities but especially for those requiring concentration. Studying at home is a very difficult activity requiring very good self-discipline and a cooperative family.

71. I'm helping my husband put the crop in and it doesn't seem easy to find the time to study.

72. Have been asked to be a student representative for this part of the province for Athabasca University. Quite a switch in education, isn't it? I'd take a guess that many of us are older than the faculty members. What's that saying about everything comes to he who waits?

73. I became very sick for most of last week, so I was unable to do much of my course.

74. Put in a lot of over time at work, as we had a broken machine, so had to go to --- to finish off our papers.

75. Had little time to work on it. We were short-staffed at the office.

76. AU can do nothing to help. My wife says she thinks to run a business and increase study time is a conflict of interest. Therefore I believe I will be looking for a steady job so I can concentrate on this course.

77. I have a job that comes and goes on an irregular basis. I was called to work this week which took time and energy away from studies.

Appendix B

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WEEKLY MONITORING FORM (CMF)

DATE: _____

CITY OF: _____

COURSE: _____

EVENT	DATE	EVENT	DATE	SOURCE
1. Did you send any assignments this week?	____	5. Did you write an exam this week?	____	
2. Did you receive written and/or verbal comments about an assignment this week?	____	6. Did you receive an exam mark this week?	____	AD Exam Section .. Tutor ___ Coordinator ___ Other ___
3. Did you make any exam requests this week?	____	7. Did you receive written and/or verbal comments about an exam this week?	____	Tutor .. Coordinator .. Other .
4. Did you have your exam date acknowledged by AD this week?	____	IF ANY OF THE ABOVE occurred THIS WEEK, ENTER THIS DAY -- | |		

STUDY TIME S = start F = finish	SUNDAY S / F	MONDAY S / F	TUESDAY S / F	WEDNESDAY S / F	THURSDAY S / F	FRIDAY S / F	SATURDAY S / F
TUTOR L/min. = Learner phones tutor/minutes on phone T/min = Tutor phones learner/minutes on phone TIME OF CALL (e.g. 8:00 pm)	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___
COORDINATOR L/min. = Learner phones coordinator/ minutes on phone C/min. = Coordinator phones Learner/ minutes on phone TIME OF CALL (e.g. 8:00 pm)	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___	CC ___ A ___ M ___ C ___ F ___ S ___ O ___

CC = Course-related content issues
A = Administrative details
M = Help related to: studying, life goals, personal problems
C = Checking in
F = Feedback on assignments/exams
S = Shooting-the-breeze
O = Other

1. Rate your overall motivation in this course for this week (circle a number)

NOT AT ALL MOTIVATED 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 VERY MOTIVATED

2. What event/things led you to make this rating? (Please answer on back)
3. If this reflects a change from last week please explain the difference. (Please answer on back)
4. What has A.U. done or could have done to improve your motivation for this week? (Please answer on back)